

Element 152: Ocean State Outdoors: Rhode Island's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

01 Introduction

Ocean State Outdoors is the State of Rhode Island's comprehensive plan for outdoor recreation, conservation, and open space, adopted by the State Planning Council on March 13, 2003. This plan, the seventh edition, reaffirms the overarching goals established in the 1992 plan, reassesses the present situation, and establishes the objectives and the implementation strategies for strengthening outdoor recreation, conservation, and open space in Rhode Island over the next five years.

The 2003 edition of the plan was prepared by the Department of Environmental Management and the Statewide Planning Program.

As a Rhode Island state policy document, *Ocean State Outdoors* serves several key purposes:

State Guide Plan. - The plan is an element of the Rhode Island State Guide Plan, and, as such, has legislated stature that requires the consistency of all publicly supported activities, both planning and project implementation. State agencies, municipalities and all public and private entities receiving public support are expected to carry out any recreation, conservation and open space activity in a way that is consistent with this element of the State Guide Plan.

State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) -- *Ocean State Outdoors* is also submitted by Rhode Island to meet the National Park Service's planning eligibility requirements for the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund program. While resources of this program have diminished, it remains a valuable source of support for protecting resources and providing facilities for public recreational use.

State Recreational Trails Plan -- In concert with State Guide Plan Element 155, *A Greener Path... Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island's Future*, this plan addresses the requirements of the U.S. Department of Transportation -- Federal Highway Administration's National Recreational Trails Program that provides funds to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities.

Wetlands Priority Plan -- This plan provides an update to the wetlands priority plan required under the federal Emergency Wetlands Conservation Act. Updates to the original 1988 plan are submitted to the National Park Service periodically as part of SCORP updates.

New research conducted particularly for the 2003 update of *Ocean State Outdoors*, investigated existing conditions and the current supply and demand for recreation and natural resource protection in Rhode Island from several vantage points. The inventory of existing statewide recreation facilities was updated and three surveys obtained input from the general public and state and local recreation professionals.

The Vision:

A statewide system of connecting greenspaces and greenways, a network made up of critical natural and cultural resources, outdoor recreation facilities, public spaces, community and urban forests, public and private open spaces. The greenspace system is to be Rhode Island's permanent green framework within which the state's communities will design and build in the 21st century.

The Mission:

Strengthen and expand Rhode Island's greenspace and outdoor recreation system. Continue an aggressive program for open space preservation and greenway development. Strengthen relationships between state agencies and municipalities, land trusts, and non-profit organizations..

02 Goals and Policies:

Goal 1 *Building the Greenspace Network...Preserve and Protect Natural and Cultural Resources*

Rhode Island will strengthen and expand the statewide network of greenspaces and greenways, with natural and cultural resources and outdoor recreation areas as major features of the network.

Policies: Aggressively pursue creation of an integrated, statewide greenspace and greenways system through coordinated state and local planning, strategic acquisition, resource protection partnerships and integration of green infrastructure in development projects.

Maintain natural diversity by preserving the integrity of Rhode Island's ecosystems.

Protect water resources, including rivers, lakes, ponds, streams and surrounding lands.

Protect surface and groundwater resource areas, critical watersheds and aquifer recharge areas.

Protect wetlands and floodplains to maintain their natural functions and to minimize damage from floods.

Protect significant island and coastal sites.

Conserve and enhance urban and community forests for multiple uses—water supply and water quality, recreation, forest products, energy and wildlife habitat – as fundamental to high quality woodland and urban environments.

Support agricultural uses and preserve the best farmland for active agricultural purposes.

Protect and maintain fish and wildlife populations at optimum levels and provide opportunities for wildlife-based recreation.

Preserve significant historic, architectural and archeological sites, buildings and districts.

Protect scenic areas and resources including landscapes, roadways, and views of the waterfront and significant geologic features.

Goal 2 *Meeting Critical Needs...Improve Recreation Opportunities and Resource Conservation*

Rhode Island will improve its system of outdoor recreation facilities and conservation areas to meet the needs of its residents and visitors.

Policies: Provide a diverse, balanced system offering quality recreational opportunities that meet user needs.

Preserve and expand public access to the shoreline.

Improve and expand opportunities for recreational use of saltwater beaches.

Preserve and expand recreational boating opportunities.

Preserve and expand access to the state's rivers, lakes, ponds, streams and other inland waters for recreational use, while maintaining water quality.

Provide hunting, fishing and other extensive recreational opportunities while protecting the resources and natural character of the state's management areas.

Provide opportunities for hunting and fishing, where feasible, throughout the state.

Maintain and expand the state's network of trails and pedestrian paths, in natural and built areas.

Strengthen and expand opportunities for open space and outdoor recreation for urban residents.

Strengthen and expand community-based recreation facilities and open spaces to meet close-to-home needs.

Maintain and expand greenspace facilities, for both active and passive use, in densely-developed neighborhoods and districts throughout the state.

Coordinate regional initiatives in conservation and recreation and promote sharing of facilities to meet needs on a regional, multi-town basis.

Promote Rhode Island's open space and recreation resources to tourists, while protecting the quality and stability of the resource base.

Goal 3 *Stewardship and Partnership... Improve Accessibility, Operations and Resource Management*

Rhode Island's public and private partners will join as strong stewards of the state's outdoor recreation and open space system and will protect, maintain, and improve its essential features.

Policies: **Insure a system that is accessible to all potential users.**

Cooperatively support appropriate levels of funding for the acquisition, development and renovation of the state's open spaces and recreation facilities.

Provide sufficient resources for effective operation and maintenance of state and local parks, recreation facilities and conservation areas.

Demonstrate and promote sustainable design and building concepts in recreation projects.

Provide strong public outreach and effective information about public recreation opportunities.

Develop and maximize opportunities for education within the greenspace system about the system and its specific resources.

Avoid the loss of recreation and open space system land through conversion to alternative uses, and enhance open space and recreation values, where possible, through management of public lands.

Strengthen the professional capacity for recreation, conservation and open space planning at all levels.

Maintain a coordinated planning and implementation program for the statewide system that includes State, municipal and private agencies.

Encourage information-sharing and cooperative initiatives among the state's public and private greenspace partners.

03 Strategies:

Implementation strategies, identified as Action Agenda 2003-2008, are listed following each of the plan policies. Actions include planning and coordination activities, legislative initiatives, programmatic modifications, regulatory needs, and capital investment measures.